ANSWER

TO

OBJECTIONS

AGAINST THE

LONDON-DOCKS.

LONDON, 1796.

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THE neceſſity and utility of Wet Docks for the Port of London are become ſo generally admitted, that the queſtion is now only as to their Situation, Capacity, and Management.

There are only three Situations for Docks of moment, Wapping, Rotherhithe, and the Iſle of Dogs. Each may have their natural advantages and their temporary or permanent defects. Almoſt all other plans are limited and confined to the improvement of local ſpots on the banks of the River, or of deepening the bed of it, if practicable.

Without doubting the eligibility of either of the three ſpots, the queſtions are reduced to theſe points; whether it is more for the convenience of commerce and the ultimate ſecurity of revenue to have Docks for the immediate diſcharge of ſhips under cranes, than Docks in more diſtant ſituations, under the neceſſity of lighterage, with great additional port-riſks, expenſes, and delays?

The plan of the London-Docks in Wapping embraces the firſt object and poſſeſſes the great advantage of vicinity to the City, to Revenue-Boards, and to the Seat of Buſineſs.

The Boundaries contain an area of near 70 acres. It is propoſed for the preſent to form two ſeparate Docks, one Baſon, and a large Lighter-Dock; all of them, in the preſent form of the Docks, capable of receiving near 400 ſail of loaded ſhips, with room for ſhipping and for lighters.

Two of the Entrances to be within a quarter of a mile and half a mile from the Tower, and a third by a Canal from Blackwall to the Docks,

Docks, of two miles and three-quarters long.

The Depth of the Docks and Canal to be 24 feet, and to be capable of containing ſhips from 300 to 500 tons burthen and upwards.

The exact Form and Size of the Docks and Baſons will be diſcretionary, and capable of enlargements and ſubdiviſions.

OBJECTIONS.

The only Objections of moment are, the Riſk of Fire:
The Impracticability of the Canal:
The Riſk of Smuggling in the Canal:
The Want of Capacity in the Docks:
And an Inability in the Extenſion of them.

FIRE.

Though ſhipping is a combuſtible property in all ſituations, at ſea and in port, yet it is, comparatively ſpeaking, ſubject to few riſks in either. In many ports, ſhips ride at anchor detached from each other. In the

Thames, from the extent of the trade of London, and of the ſtate of the River, they lie in diſtinct tiers, and cloſe to each other in thoſe tiers. Ships are not, however, without their riſks in the River in caſe of fires, to which veſſels in Docks are not liable. They are under no regulations about fire, candle, and cookery. At high water, all ſhips lie afloat; but, at low water, many are left dry upon the banks of the River, and have been frequently burnt from that circumſtance only. In caſe of fire, ſhips in tiers, that ground at low water, cannot move until the return of the tide. High winds and ſtrong tides create danger to ſhipping, when veſſels on fire run adrift; and there have been inſtances where floats on fire paſſing London-Bridge, falling among tiers of ſhipping at Rotherhithe, have deſtroyed two or three veſſels.

In times of froſt ſtill-waters are more liable to freeze than rivers; but, in general, our winters are not very ſevere, and the Thames is ſeldom frozen over, unleſs occaſioned by the ſhipping below Bridge often collecting and checking the ice, floating up and down with the tide, ſo as to make the River not only frozen over and impaſſable, but dange-

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rous to ſhipping, while there is little or no ice above Bridge. In Holland, and in all cold countries, where ſhips are regularly frozen up a whole winter, we ſeldom hear of accidents.

When apprehenſions are ſtrong, experience is our beſt guide; and whoever has looked at all Docks abroad and at home, will find that fires have been ſcarcely known and leſs frequent in them than in rivers. Even at Rotterdam and Amſterdam, where ſhips lay and diſcharge in Canals, cloſe to houſes, in the very hearts of thoſe cities, and liable to froſts, we ſeldom hear of fire.

In all Docks, ſhips are under the ſtrongeſt regulations about fire and candle and the uſe of pitch and tar, and are never permitted to cook on-board.

In Docks, veſſels are always afloat, which is not the caſe in rivers; they may be alſo more eaſily removed in ſtill-water to the ſide of the Dock-Quays than in a tide-way, ſo as to preſent but one ſide of a ſhip to the ſhipping in dock. In this ſituation, a veſſel on fire may be ſingled out from the reſt and ſcuttled, where there will be frequently more depth of wa-

ter than in the River at low tide, or it may be burnt by itſelf. In caſe of Fire, floating-engines and engines on ſhore would always be at hand. Buildings would not communicate Fire to ſhips in Dock, from the intermediate breadth of the wharf, and from the buildings themſelves being Fire-Proof, and no candles or fires ever permitted in them.

For the better ſecurity againſt Fire, and to Revenue, the premiſes are to be walled round, and cooking-houſes, under ſtrict regulations, to be ſtationed at particular and very diſtant angles in the premiſes, or without the ſame.

Some eſtimate may be made of the riſk from the premium of inſurance againſt Fire being the ſame in Dock as in the River.

In times of Froſt many of the ſhips might be moved out of the Docks, and lay the length of the Canal, and the Ice in the Docks and Canal frequently broken, by letting the water out of each of them, and be again repleniſhed with water on the next enſuing tide. In all ſituations, ſhips will be leſs effected by the floating Ice in Docks than in the River; and it is the opinion of the beſt-informed, that there

there is more riſk of Fire in the River than in Docks.

IMPRACTICABILITY OF THE CANAL, &c.

The objections are, its length and difficulties of Navigation; the Drawbridges; the deep cutting; and the points of Entrance, as to the depth of water and difficulty of acceſs.

Ships, navigating the Canal, may be under regulations as to the time of paſſing and repaſſing, on account of the convenience of drawbridges and the ſecurity of Revenue; and, for the greater protection of the latter, need not be permitted to navigate the Canal, but, under regulations and inſpection, from ſun-riſe to ſun-ſet.

The line of the Canal is two miles and three-quarters. It may be ſtated that an inland canal is now forming, from the River Severn to Glouceſter, for ſhips of 500 tons, the extent of which is ſeventeen miles. There is another navigable canal from Oſtend to Bruges, for ſhips of 300 tons, of twelve miles long, which are tracked by three or four horſes at the rate of about two miles an hour.

A ſhip in the Blackwall Cut may be tracked by its crew, or by horſes, in leſs than two hours with facility, from the purchaſe being eaſy and in ſtill-water.

Drawbridges. — In all paſſages of moment double Drawbridges might be made, or one Bridge be ſo ſituated as to aid another, and only to be opened at ſtated periods.

The great thoroughfares from Limehouſe and Blackwall to London are by two parallel roads, near each other, in Ratcliff-highway, Back-lane and Sermon-lane, at which Drawbridges are to be placed; and plans might be ſo arranged, with a road on each ſide of the Canal, that veſſels might paſs each at ſtated periods; and the Drawbridges only opened at one road while ſhut at the other, of which ſignals might be given. The diſtance of either road would not make much difference, and the delay little. In all other parts of the Canal, the line of it runs behind the preſent buildings, and leaves an uninterrupted communication between London with Limehouſe and Blackwall, and thoſe places with each other or with the River. The only remaining inconveniencies of moment,

ment, with reſpect to the other roads and Drawbridges, are over to Stepney, and Bow, and Bromley, where the intercourſe is comparatively ſmall, and where Drawbridges when opened would not take three minutes to open and ſhut for the paſſage of a ſhip; and, on an average, a leſs period per ſhip, if more than one paſſed at a time.

At the Liverpool, Hull, Oſtend, and Havre Docks, Drawbridges are perpetually uſed without inconvenience or delay: and, at Amſterdam and Rotterdam, Drawbridges ſo interſect the ſtreets and canals, and are ſo conſtructed, that a ſingle perſon, by means of a linch-pin, opens theſe gates when occaſion requires: they are inſtantly cloſed again by the weight of a perſon's body; and a ſingle perſon paſſing over performs the operation of cloſing the gates.

Deep cutting will only form a ſmall part of the Canal, the reſt being below high-water mark.

At the entrance of the canal at Blackwall will be a Baſon, for the reception of ſhips at all tides. Thirty veſſels may enter the ſame in one tide, and be ſhut into the Baſon at the time

time of high water, at ſpring and neap tides, and proceed at their leiſure along the Canal, under any regulations that may be requiſite.

The ſame wind that brings ſhips up the River will carry them into the Canal; and the ſame wind that carries veſſels down the River will carry them out of the Canal.

At Bugby's Hole, near the mouth of the River Lea, might be made a mooring-place for 20 ſhips and upwards, in caſe ſhips ſhould be ever prevented for a tide getting into the Canal.

The entrances into the Dock at Wapping would alſo, at all times, be open for ſhips in and above the Pool, and thereby leave the upper part of the River leſs crowded and more free for navigation.

Depth of Water. — There will be depth of water in the Docks and Canal for the reception and diſcharge of all ſhips that come into the port of London that lie above Blackwall. — There are not many ſhips above 500 tons. Small Eaſt-Indiamen could be admitted with facility, and all the large ones, that diſcharge part of their cargoes at Long Reach, and

and come up to Blackwall to diſcharge the remainder, would be able to come into the Docks and Canal for that purpoſe.

The Depth of Water at full tides will be about 24 to 26 feet, and at neat tides 19 to 21 feet. The Docks, Canal, and Gates, will be 6 feet below low-water mark of a ſpring-tide.

The Filth or Sediment in the Docks and Canal would be ſmall compared with Hull, Liverpool, Oſtend, and Ramſgate, and all places that lie within the tide of the ſea or the vortex of its influence.

The Baſons at Blackwall and at Wapping would be more ſuſceptible of the influence of the Sediment of the River than the Docks or Canal, and they could always be cleaned by back-water at pleaſure. It is remarkable that at Hull, and other Docks where there are no back-waters, that the Filth only reaches about the length of a ſhip.

SMUGGLING.

Ships in the River and in the Canal will be, in many reſpects, in the ſame ſituation, and

and under the ſame regulations and inſpection of officers, and of not breaking their hatchways or unloading their cargoes until arrived at moorings in the River or into Docks by the Canal.

Smuggling will not be ſo great when ſhips are pent up in a narrow Canal as in the River: if any, it will be before ſhips come ſo high up the River.

The great harveſt of plunder is at the moment a ſhip begins to work out her cargo, and is partly owing to the mode of diſcharge and the frequent delays and detentions for lighters. Smuggling in the River is great from its facility, and is formed into a regular ſyſtem from the number of boats conſtantly hovering about ſhips night and day during the diſcharge, from the men employed in working them going on ſhore two or three times a day to their meals, and from the eaſe of ſecreting of plunder in receiving-houſes along the banks of the River, with back or cellar doors to them, where no inquiries are made. This trade furniſhes many a retail ſhop to a great extent, and to an extent almoſt paſt all belief. Some calculate it at near 4 or 500,000*l.*

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per annum, but may be taken, within bounds, at above 200,000*l.* per annum.

Lighters conſtitute a ſecond ſtage of pilfering from the freſh opportunities given to plunder, independent of new delays, new riſks, and heavy expenſes in port.

The Evils of the River are great; nothing can correct it and give ſecurity to property and to revenue but diſpatch. The landing of cargoes immediately out of the ſhip under cranes to the king's beam will leſſen expenſe, decreaſe riſks and delays attendant on all other plans and ſpots, and give relief to the merchant, eaſe and economy, and ſecurity and increaſe to the revenue.

No Evils on the Canal can be compared to the preſent ones on the River. Regulations can be more eaſily applied to ſhips paſſing the Canal in their way to the Docks to diſcharge, than in the preſent defective and expenſive ſyſtem of unloading in the River, and watching the cargo in detail in lighters until landed.

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With every advantage of Docks in other ſituations they will always be ſubject to riſks, detentions, and port-charges, to which the propoſed Docks will be exempted.

In the Canal, ſhips might be put under protection and regulation as to the mode and time of paſſing, between ſun-riſe and ſun-ſet, for the convenience of the paſſenger and ſecurity of the revenue, and not be permitted to break bulk or open their hatchways until they come into Dock. Officers can, with greater facility, watch, protect, and detect, in the Canal than in the River, and particularly as there will be few lighters and boats in the Canal, or receiving-houſes along-ſide its banks. Little ſmuggling could go forward with the hook and line without noiſe or detection; beſides letting down ſugar and other property into the water without injury or previous preparation on-board.

It would alſo be much eaſier to correct the evils on the Canal by regulations, than have hitherto been effected upon the River. Even the Bomb-Boat Act has not prevented boats in the River ſmuggling, particularly at

at night-time, which gives every means, opportunity, and ſecurity, to plunder.

There was little objection as to the line of Canal up to Glouceſter about ſmuggling.

MEANS OF EXTENSION.

Though the boundaries or general outlines of the ground were obliged to be ſpecified, yet the form and number of the Docks may be varied, increaſed, and ſubdivided, according to convenience or to the calls of trade.

The Canal itſelf forms a large Dock, capable of a number of receſſes and depôts, or magazines, for corn, coals, timber, and other articles, ſo as to give to the metropolis ſecurity, cheapneſs, and eaſy cartage, upon emergencies or in times of froſt, independent of forming depôts for foreign trade, and of leſſening ſome of the ſuppoſed apprehenſions of riſks about fire in Docks and in the River.

The Canal would in itſelf make a great leading feature, and form one of the entrances or avenues to a ſeries of docks, in the vicinity

vicinity of the metropolis on the north ſide of the Thames. Theſe Docks might be made in the Iſle of Dogs and higher up on each ſide of the Canal, with ſeveral communications to the River for various claſſes of trades and objects, and would unite, by means of inland navigations, in one great ſyſtem our foreign and our internal trade.

Though the intended Bill was limited at this moment to a ſpecific object for preſent accommodation, yet there will be found leading principles in it of making depôts on the moſt extenſive ſcale, and of forming a baſis for future extenſions whenever an increaſe of commerce or a change of circumſtances ſhould call for them.

In forming, however, theſe extenſions, relation ſhould be had to the times, to the nature and extent of our commerce, the comparative bulk of our foreign and our domeſtic trade, and to thoſe regulations and ſituations that are the moſt peculiarly adapted to their reſpective and particular intereſts and convenience of thoſe trades; and it will become a queſtion how far the coaſting-trade on an extenſive ſcale is attached or will attach

itſelf

itſelf to the bed and the banks of the River, and whether, if placed into Docks, they would not require the ſame lighter-navigation as at preſent, without leſſening ſome of the evils occaſioned by the crowded ſtate of the River? In many caſes, the coaſting-trade would be removed from their accuſtomed wharfs, along the banks of the River, where they already diſcharge under cranes.

Leaving the principles of the Bill and the neceſſity of the Docks to ſtand or fall by the ſupport or wants of the public, I ſhall make a ſhort reply to the objections of the London-Dock Company being monopoliſts, and to the length of time of making the Docks.

In general, Corporations poſſeſs great monopolies and excluſive privileges; but the London-Dock Company aſk no excluſive ones, invade few rights, take away no tolls from the City which are levied on the commerce of the port by charters or acts, and leave other plans open.

All ſhips will have the liberty to go into the Docks, and, when in them, to diſcharge at

at their own diſcretion at the quays or into lighters, and thus accommodate every part of the River.

They aſk no parliamentary aid, and only its ſanction to purchaſe and ſatisfy for lands, houſes, and intereſts, and to have powers of internal regulations.

The time of completing the Docks has been another *objection*. Parts may be finiſhed and uſed in about two or three years, and afford ſpeedy relief while the greater works were carried on; and, on a peace, employment might be given to a number of hands, diſmiſſed from public ſervice.

A limitation of dividends was made to correct evils found in ſome other public undertakings, and to compel a reduction of rates or extenſion of conveniencies. Many companies and canals are limited as to dividends.

What conſtitutes a part of the merit of the Bill has been objected to as its great defect, and has been induſtriouſly and *purpoſely miſſtated*, to miſlead the public mind, by men whoſe ſtations were created for public convenience,

nience, and not for their own private emolument, and who would not like their own monopolies or their own profits to be checked or controlled.

The preſent plan has been propoſed and ſupported, by mercantile intereſts, for commercial convenience, and to correct the evils which they themſelves labour under. If it be aſked, under whoſe management ſhould the plan be carried into execution? the ſame reply may be given which ſome of the old wiſe merchants of France gave, in the days of M. Colbert, when he aſked them how he could beſt ſerve and promote commerce, "*Laiſſez nous faire.*"

The merchants are the beſt guardians of commerce, and the beſt know their own wants, and are the beſt able to correct their own evils. Their plans will create diſpatch and competitions in a port that has for years laboured under combinations that have been injurious to property and to revenue, and oppreſſive to commerce.

THE END.

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